

Knocking at the College Door

Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity, 1992-2022

WISCONSIN

At over 3.3 million, the nation's graduating class of 2007-08 is projected to be history's largest. In fact, 2007-08 will mark the last year in an era of continuous growth in the nation's production of high school graduates, a period that reaches back to 1994. Over that time, the number of graduates swelled by 35.7 percent. In 2008-09, however, our country will begin a protracted period during which its production of high school graduates is expected to stagnate, assuming existing patterns persist. The number of graduates nationally will dip slightly over the next several years before growth resumes at a slower pace around 2015. Ultimately, projections indicate that between 2004-05 (the last year of available actual data) and 2021-22, the number of high school graduates will grow by approximately 265,000, or 8.6 percent.

The national data obscure significant variations in this picture at the regional and state levels, however. Regionally, in the decade leading up to 2004-05, the number of high school graduates grew the fastest in the West at 34 percent, with the South growing by 23.5 percent, the Northeast by 20.7 percent, and the Midwest by 14.2 percent. But the regions face very different futures in the years to come. The South will see the most growth in its production of high school graduates, at about 9 percent by 2014-15; and the West's numbers will climb by 7.1 percent. But the number of graduates produced in the Northeast and the Midwest will decline – by 6.1 and 3 percent, respectively.

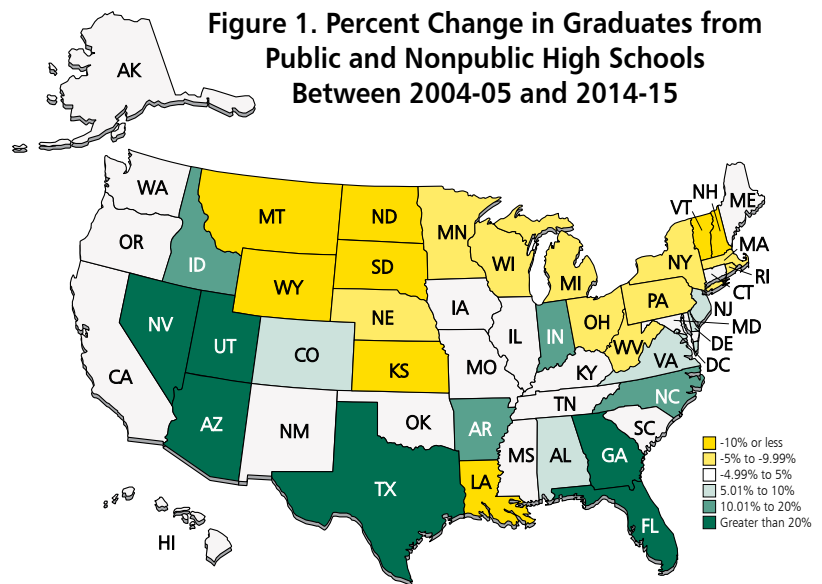
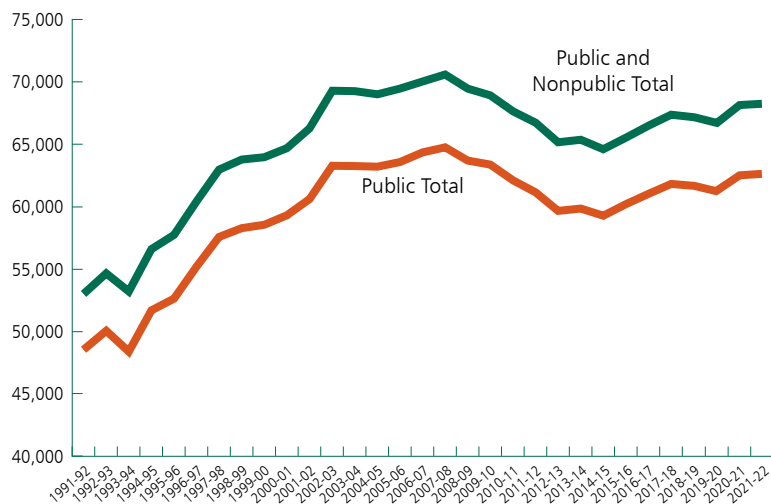


Figure 2. Wisconsin High School Graduates 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)



As with the national view, the regional picture masks considerable variation at the state level (Figure 1). Wisconsin produced 12,321 more graduates in 2004-05 than it did a decade earlier, an increase of 21.7 percent. Projections indicate that the state's number of graduates will grow though 2007-08 before beginning a sustained decline, assuming existing patterns of high school completion and migration continue. Wisconsin projects to produce about 1,600 more high school graduates in 2007-08 than it did in 2004-05, an increase equal to about 2.4 percent.

Wisconsin was among the states with rapid growth in its production of high school graduates between 1991-92 and 2004-05, the most recent year of actual data from public schools (Figure 2). In 2004-05, 63,229 students graduated from public high schools in the state, 14,666 more graduates than were produced in 1991-92, representing growth of 30.2 percent. Nonpublic schools

in the state added an estimated 5,752 in 2004-05, which was about 1,280 more than graduated in 1991-92. Of Wisconsin's total number of high school graduates each year, on average, nonpublic schools produced an estimated 8 percent.

However, along with much of the rest of the nation, Wisconsin is poised to enter a new period characterized by much more stagnant growth or declines in the production of high school graduates. After reaching a peak in 2007-08 at 64,739, the state will see a mostly uninterrupted decline in the number of public high school graduates through 2014-15, assuming a continuation of existing patterns of enrollment, progression, and completion. During that timeframe, the number of high school graduates is forecast to drop by about 5,400 (8.4 percent). Subsequently, projections indicate that production will recover, ultimately reaching above 62,500 by 2021-22.

The racial/ethnic composition of Wisconsin's public high school graduating classes will continue to diversify over the coming decade and more (Figure 3). In 1994-95, White non-Hispanics accounted for 91.5 percent of the graduates from the state's public high schools. A decade later, that proportion had dropped to 86.3 percent. By 2014-15, the proportion of White non-Hispanics will have fallen to under 81.3 percent.

These changes are roughly comparable to the experience of states all over the country. Although the magnitude may differ substantially, the nation as a whole is undergoing sweeping changes in the racial/ethnic composition of its population. In Wisconsin, as in other states, the big changes are the result of rapid growth in the number of Hispanic high school students and graduates, coupled with a shrinking number of White non-Hispanics in the educational pipeline. While immigration has contributed to the growth of the Hispanic population, signs of the continuing demographic shift are evident in data indicating a dramatic increase in the number of Hispanic births, which is due in part to a higher fertility rate among Hispanic women.

Figure 3. Composition of Wisconsin's Public High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity 2004-05 (Actual), 2009-10, and 2014-15 (Projected)

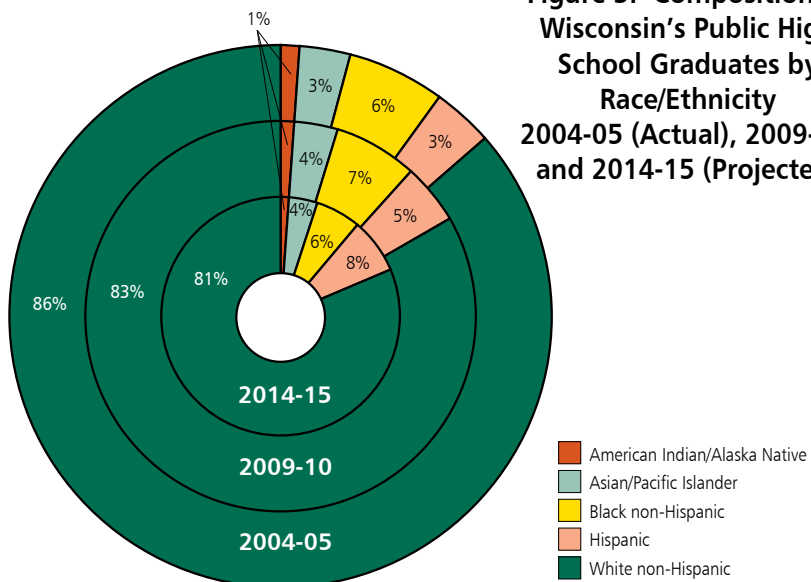
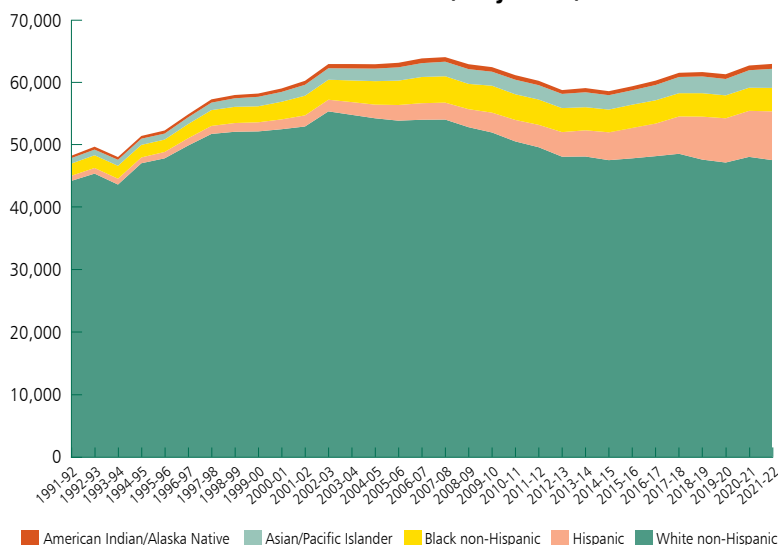


Figure 4. Wisconsin High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity, 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Actual), 2005-06 to 2021-22 (Projected)



Hispanic graduates from public schools in the state numbered 2,201 in 2004-05. But within a decade Hispanic graduates are projected to more than double about 4,475 (Figure 4). Growth among Asians/Pacific Islanders will also be considerable over the same time span, rising by almost 15 percent over the 2004-05 level of 2,011. Black non-Hispanics, who accounted for 3,751 graduates in 2004-05, will decrease in number by about 110 in 2014-15, after having seen increases initially that topped out in 2009-10. Meanwhile, the number of White non-Hispanic graduates will tumble by more than 12 percent from its 2004-05 level of 54,566. Finally, American Indians/Alaska Natives, who accounted for 700 graduates in 2004-05, are projected to see a reduction of about 10 percent over the same span.

For more information, contact: Dolores Mize, Vice President, Public Policy and Research, 303.541.0221, dmize@wiche.edu; or Brian Prescott, Senior Research Analyst, Public Policy and Research, 303.541.0255, bprescott@wiche.edu. To view the full publication or to place an order for a bound copy, visit our website at www.wiche.edu/policy.